



# Intercultura

Incontri che cambiano il mondo. Dal 1955

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# BENVENUTO IN ITALIA!

We are sending you this booklet to warmly welcome you among us and to prepare you for your experience in Italy. **This booklet has been made to be used, and not just to be read.**

You will find situations, cartoons, pictures upon which to stop and reflect. Throughout the booklet, you will find a number of Italian words which are commonly used and which are important for you to learn.

You will not find all the answers to your questions here, because each day that you live with us, the number of questions you have will grow.

For this reason we hope that you will find this booklet to be a useful tool and that you will bring it with you and continue to refer to it throughout your stay in Italy.



## The AFS mission statement

### AFS Statement of Purpose

AFS is an international, voluntary, non governmental, non-profit organization that provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

### The Core Values and Attributes of AFS

AFS enables people to act as responsible, global citizens working for peace and understanding in a diverse world. It acknowledges that peace is a dynamic concept threatened by injustice, inequity, and intolerance.

AFS seeks to affirm faith in the dignity and worth of every human being and of all nations and cultures. It encourages respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion or social status.

AFS activities are based on our core values of dignity, respect for differences, harmony, sensitivity, and tolerance.





## AFS-Intercultura

### Volunteers and Local Chapters

There are over 900 AFS-Intercultura volunteers throughout Italy and they are divided into local chapters (centri locali) which are located in nearly every province. The local chapters do many things: Promote our programs, select students and host families, run orientation sessions for students and host families, assist and support exchange students and host families, maintain and develop contacts with the schools and local authorities, and organize local and national seminars and meetings.

The volunteers are coordinated by a small body of professionals. The people who work in the office take care of general coordination of the various activities in the following areas: Sending

programs, Hosting programs, Development and Marketing, Administration (including travel), Volunteers and Public relations.



### Assistente

Each host family and each foreign student has a volunteer with whom they can discuss questions and problems; this person is called a "counselor" (assistente) and his/her goal is to assist the family and the student in having a good and open relationship, to prevent and solve problems which can arise, and to facilitate the adjustment of each to the new experience.

#### ***Keep in mind..***

Please know that you can call on any volunteer for advice or help during your time in Italy and that you always have the services of the national office staff in Colle Val d'Elsa in the province of Siena at your disposal.

You will be given the name of your assistente upon your arrival in Italy; you should contact him /her soon after your arrival. During the year, you should be able to talk to this person about any possible problems or doubts and about anything which you may find difficult to discuss with your Italian family, or friends, or teachers. Throughout your experience, the volunteers in your local chapter will ask you to participate in their meetings and, if possible, to give them a hand in organizing some of their activities. If you cannot reach your "assistente" within one week after your arrival in your host community, please contact your local chapter or call the national office.



## AFS-Intercultura rules

AFS-INTERCULTURA has very few rules because we recognize that the participants on our programs in general have demonstrated their ability to make responsible decisions on their own. However, since we have guaranteed your stay in Italy, your actions are a part of our legal responsibility. The rules we ask you to follow are not meant to limit your freedom, but to insure that your stay is safe and that your experience is of the highest quality.

### No driving

Because of insurance policies and Italian laws, even if you have a valid driver's license in your country, you are not allowed to drive any kind of motor vehicle bearing a license number (cars, motorcycles,...); also motorbikes are forbidden. You cannot ride private airplanes.

### No hitch-hiking

You are not allowed to hitch hike, due to both legal and moral risks which arise in the case of an accident.

### No Drugs

Drugs, as in the rest of the world, there is an increasing intolerance of the use and sale of illegal drugs. As with any laws of a hosting country, a foreign student is expected to follow them.

### Italian Laws

All AFS-Intercultura participants must obey to the legal laws of Italy. AFS-Intercultura cannot protect you if you disobey any laws.

### Piercing and tattoos

Some participants decide that they would like to have a tattoo or a piercing done while they are on the program. In Italy it's necessary to be of legal age to have such things done or minors need to be accompanied by a legal tutor to an authorized structure which complies to the necessary requirements set by the Italian Ministry of Health.

Nonetheless (and despite the fact that some students can be or become of legal age during the program) Intercultura forbids such practices as they can be considered unnecessary minor surgeries which can uselessly put at risk the participant's health.

Ear piercing can be the only exception we might consider but it's necessary to get, through the AFS offices, the written authorization by the natural parents. Piercing on other parts of the body and tattoos done without authorization are reasons for an Early Return.

### Participant Travel

You cannot travel alone. The aims of being on an AFS-INTERCULTURA program is to learn about our country through your Italian family, your Italian school, and your Italian community, we hope you did not come on the program to be a "tourist."

You may travel in Italy with the following conditions:

- you travel with at least one member of your Italian family
- you travel on a tour organized by your school
- you are travelling because of an activity organized by AFS-INTERCULTURA

In any case, when you travel you must inform the chairperson of the local AFS-INTERCULTURA chapter.

You cannot travel with your natural family or with friends from your country, unless your Italian local chapter, your host family, and the Italian Central Office give you in advance permission to do so for very special reasons or situations.



It is important that you realize that breaking any of the above mentioned rules results in an immediate expulsion from the AFS-INTERCULTURA program and being sent home



## AFS-Intercultura calendar for hosting programs

|                   |  |              |   |
|-------------------|--|--------------|---|
| Early September   | Arrival of the year and trimester program students. One day orientation before going to the Italian families.  | February     | End of Winter short program. Short evaluation in Rome before departure. Italian language course for semester program.               |
| Mid September     | Beginning of school. Italian language course for year and trimester programs. (1)  | March        | Exchange week. (4)  |
|                   |  | March April  | One week Easter vacation.   |
| Mid October       | Three days regional/local orientation course for year and trimester program. (2)   | Mid June     | Year and semester program: End of stay evaluation and preparation to go back to native countries: four days in regional groups. (5) |
| Early December    | Arrival of Winter short program students. Short program orientation before going to the Italian families and starting school. Trimester program: short evaluation and departure. |              |   |
|                   |  | Late June    | Arrival of Summer program students from the USA. One week language and orientation camp before going to the host communities.       |
| Dec. 23<br>Jan. 7 | Christmas vacations.   | Early August | Departure of the Summer students. Short evaluation before departure for the sites for a two week cultural or language study camp.   |
| Late January      | Semester programs: Arrival and short program orientation. (3)  |              |   |

(1) Local chapters are responsible for organizing a language course for the students. The language course generally begins approx. two weeks after the students arrival. (In February for semester program).

(2) In this occasion the students have a chance to talk about their experience so far and gives the volunteers a chance to evaluate them and help them if needed.

(3) There will be a Survival Orientation Camp for all students immediately upon arrival. This will last for two days. In this occasion the students have a chance to talk about their expectations and be oriented towards family and school adjustment.

(4) Between February and April the local chapters organize an exchange-week in which the students (generally, in Italy on the Year Program) can choose to visit another part of Italy, in order to get in touch with a different reality within the country itself. The local chapters are responsible for finding the students a host family for this week and the students are responsible for paying all travel expenses. This activity is not mandatory and can be denied to a student by the local chapter/national office in the case of behavioral or adjustment problems or other particular circumstances related to the student's experience.

(5) This gives the students the opportunity to evaluate their own experience and how much of the language and culture they have learned. It also gives the students a chance to be together one last time to learn and share with each other thoughts about their experiences.

Each local chapter organizes activities for students and host families throughout the year, for example parties and excursions to other cities in Italy. Excursions may be at the students' expense.

### Key words...

**Centro Locale or Local Chapter:** Organizes most of the local AFS-Intercultura activities.

**Assistente or Counselor:** The volunteer you should address when you need some advice.

**Colle Val d'Elsa:** In Tuscany, where the AFS-Intercultura national office is located.



# MARE E MONTAGNA, CALDO E FREDDO

## TERRA E CLIMA

Geographically, Italy is a peninsula of 301.268 square kilometers in the middle of the Mediterranean sea. Over 75% of the peninsula is composed by hills or mountains. The widest plain, not only of Italy but of the Southern part of Europe, is the Po River valley in the North. Italy's extensive coastline is another important feature - 7240 km - including that of the two largest and most populated islands: Sicily and Sardinia.

Despite its geographical position at the center of the temperate zone, Italy has rather variable climatic characteristics. This is due to the presence of the Mediterranean, whose warm waters mitigate thermal extreme, and the Alpine arc, which forms a barrier against the cold north winds. Furthermore, Italy is subject to both wet and moderate atmospheric currents from the Atlantic Ocean and dry and cold ones from Eastern Europe.

Six large climatic regions can be distinguished, mainly characterized by mountain influence:



1. An Alpine region, strongly influenced by altitude, with long cold winters and short cool summers having an elevated day-time temperature range; precipitation is more intense in the summer months, especially in the pre-Alpine belt.

2. A Po region, with continental conditions, consisting of cold and often snowy winters and warm and sultry summers; precipitation is greatest in the spring and autumn months; fog is frequent, due to the wetness of the land.



3. An Adriatic region with a continental climate, with winters dominated by cold north-east winds.

4. An Apennine region, also with continental tendencies and cold winters, precipitation is abundant in all seasons apart from summer.



5. A Ligurian-Tyrrhenian region, with a maritime climate and heavy and frequent precipitation, which is less in the summer and distributed irregularly; the winters are cool and the annual temperature range narrow (10°).

6. A Mediterranean region also with a limited annual temperature range; precipitation is frequent, especially in winter, and the summers are hot and dry.

## Key words...

Tempo/Weather  
Temperatura/  
Temperature  
Clima/Climate  
Caldo/Hot  
Freddo/Cold  
Sole/Sun  
Luna/Moon  
Stelle/Stars  
Pioggia/Rain  
Nebbia/Fog  
Neve/Snow  
Nuvole/Clouds  
Vento/Wind  
Mare/Sea  
Montagna/Mountain  
Fiume/River.  
Com'è il tempo?  
C'è il sole e fa caldo  
(Piove e fa' freddo)!  
How is the weather?  
Sunny and hot  
(Rainy and cold)!





## Italy, European Union and the Mediterranean

Italy is situated on the southern border of Europe and her peninsula, with surrounding islands, reaches almost the coast of Africa. Just because of this geographical position, Italy has direct contact with the main ethnic and cultural areas of the Old World (neo-Latin, Germanic and Slav-Balkan) as well as, through the North Africa countries, with the world of Arab Islamic civilization.



Consequently, while remaining firmly anchored in the world of western or European civilization, which was the direct heir of the Greco-Roman culture that developed and flourished on this peninsula for over a millennium, Italy seems to stretch out naturally towards the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, practically dividing

its western and eastern basins. Thus Italy can be considered the most logical link between Europe and the peoples of Africa and Asia, bordering as they do on the same sea and sharing over many centuries both historical events and cultural influences.

### The European Union

The European Union is a union of fifteen independent states founded to enhance political, economic and social cooperation. The European Union has been formed to lay the foundation for lasting peace and prosperity in what was formerly a deeply divided continent with contrasting political and economic systems.

The EU deals with decisions regarding economic policy, foreign affairs, development and relations with the developing countries.

The Union now embraces 370 million citizens from Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden and Finland.



With the expansion of the Union and the resultant broadening of its responsibilities, the institutions have equally grown and become more numerous. In addition to the European Commission, Parliament, Council of Ministers and Court of Justice, we now have the European Court of Auditors, the European Central Bank, the Economic and Social Committee and, more recently, the Committee of the Regions.



### "The Euro"

The euro is the single currency of the European Monetary Union, which was adopted by 11 Member States from 1 January 1999. Presently, the 11 Member States are Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland.



# ITALIA, ITALIA, ITALIA!

## Italian cultures

It is quite difficult to define the values which all the Italians recognize and to define a cultural profile of our country. Why?

Because through the centuries there have been many factors which have contributed to differentiate the behavior and beliefs of various parts of Italy. Here there are some tips to dive into the **diversifying and unifying factors** of the various Italian cultures.

## History

Italy has reached political unity only in 1870; until that time the various regions had separate histories which created different values and perspective among their inhabitants.

## Geography

The fact of being a long and narrow peninsula with great climatic variances has an effect on the differences in life styles between the North and the South.

## Economy

The preceding points have had an effect on the different economic development, today the North is predominantly industrial and much wealthier than the South.

The economic development has not been uniform throughout the country and there are significant differences between north and south. Italy's main exports include machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, clothing and footwear.

Tourism remains a significant source of income.

### Key words...

Storia/History  
Geografia/Geography  
Economia/Economy  
Religione/Religion  
Immigrazione /  
Immigration  
Politica/Politics  
Nord & Sud/  
North & South  
Calcio/Soccer  
Stereotipi/Stereotypes  
Giornali/Newspapers  
Libri/Books  
Televisione/Television  
Radio/Radio.

## North&South

A large internal migration took place in Italy between 1950 and 1965.

During these years, several million Italians moved from the much poorer South to look for work in the North. After a period of distrust and cultural clashes, this North-South encounter has eventually led to the creation of bicultural families, new eating habits, new customs and understandings. Even if the Italians from the different regions have come to know each other better than in the past, the cultural differences remain and are not easily overlooked. Many prejudices still

exist today and have given origin to terms to indicate "the others." Some Italians from the North may define the southerners as "terroni" (hillbillies, people who live off of land cultivation), the latter, in turn, call the northerners "polentoni" (people who eat polenta [cornmeal]).

## Language & Dialect

There are certain linguistic differences, the modern Italian language evolved from the dialect spoken in Tuscany in the medieval times. In the other regions, people used to speak and often still speak local dialects besides Italian. These dialects are not just a variety of the national language or a slangish Italian, but are true and proper languages derived from late Latin. Therefore "piemontese," spoken in Piedmont, is different from "siciliano," spoken in Sicily, just as French is different from Spanish. When the Italians speak Italian, it is often easy to recognize the speaker's origin from his/her regional accent. Nowadays, young people maintain the regional accent, but generally do not speak dialect and refrain from using dialect outside the family environment.

## Linguistic minorities and immigration

Italy has a population of almost 57 million and an average population density of 189 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Rome is the most densely populated city with 2.7 million people.

There are linguistic minorities, there are groups of people in Italy which speak old languages or languages of other countries. You can find minorities which speak German, French, Raetho-romansch (these three are legally and officially recognized), Greek, Albanian, Slovenian, Hungarian, Catalan, Occitan, Franco-provinçal, Rom (gipsies). Some of these linguistic groups are quite large, while others include just a few thousand people.

In Italy of the almost 800.000 foreign residents, 150.000 come from other countries within the European Union. Immigration from developing countries is a recent and growing phenomenon.

## The administrative and political system

Italy is a parliamentary republic. Power is vested in parliament, which consists of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The President, who is elected by the Parliament for seven years, appoints the president of the Council of Ministers (prime minister). The national policies are guided by the Cabinet of Ministers (the Government, il Governo). For administrative purposes, Italy is divided into





20 regions, with considerable autonomy. Five of them - Valle d'Aosta, Trentino Alto Adige, Sicilia, Sardegna, and Friuli Venezia Giulia - have special constitutions giving them a wider degree of autonomy than the other 15.

- Political parties play a very important role: in organizing elections for their candidates, but also in controlling many aspects of public life.
- Another important role is played by some large financial groups, by the association which represents the Italian industry (CONFIDUSTRIA) and by the Worker's Unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL).
- Italy is a part of large international organizations, the European Union being the most influential. Currently many policies are no longer planned and implemented, but in Brussels.

Even if Italy is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, there are still many problems to solve. Organized crime ("Mafia", "N'drangheta" and "Camorra") originated in Southern Italy but today is spread throughout the country. Other issues are connected to the reformation of the State, to youth unemployment, to the large internal inequalities in terms of quality of life: public services, working, housing, pollution and so on.

### The role of the Roman Catholic Church in Italy

· In order to understand Italy, one must understand the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the country's history and in its contemporary life. The majority of the population is Catholic, even though there are important Jewish, Orthodox, Protestant, Muslim and Waldensian communities. The importance of the Church can be noted by the fact that in a country that has been politically divided since the fall of the Roman Empire, the papacy is the only dynasty which spans the entire history of the country.

· The relations between the Italian State and the Roman Catholic Church are regulated by a concordato (agreement) undersigned in 1984. Catholicism is no longer the state religion nor it is required teaching in state schools. The Church has influenced the Italians' way of thinking (even those who do not consider themselves religious), and throughout the centuries

it has influenced our behavior, our politics, our art (a large part of Italian art is religiously inspired). Both in cities and small towns, there are numerous religious traditions which are the basis for celebrations and cultural events that might be very interesting for a young visitor.

### Art

Italy was the birthplace of some of the greatest names in art and sculpture. Italian artists played important roles in early Christian art and in the styles of the Middle Ages. Among the best-known artists are Giotto, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raffaello e Botticelli. Every year, countless visitors come to Italy to see some of the priceless art collections and magnificent architecture.

### Calcio (soccer or European football)

It is not only considered a sport practiced by few and watched by many, but it also is a kind of symbolic display of national honor.

### Stereotypes

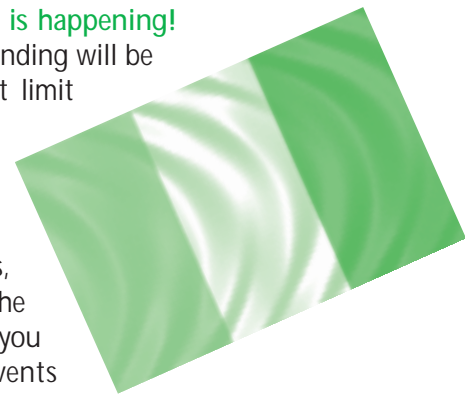
There are many stereotypes about Italians: they are artistic, musical, involved with mafia, warm and open, chaotic and unorganized, imaginative, that they care about the way they dress and give great importance to food, and so on...

You have surely heard these and other comments about our country when you told your friends that you were going to be living in Italy.

Stereotypes, even if they contain sometimes a grain of truth, are nothing more than simplifications of reality. For those of you who are coming to observe our way of life, it is important not to turn stereotypes into prejudices. In other words, you must understand that stereotypes are simplifications and that reality is much more complex. Your most difficult challenge will be to put together your own interpretations of Italy, learning from your own experiences and from the clarifications that you can/must ask your Italian family, your friends, and your teachers.

### Stay up to date with what is happening!

Your discovery and understanding will be much deeper if you do not limit yourself to just speaking with whomever is close to you. Take time to regularly read one of the Italian daily newspapers, listen to some news on the radio or on TV. It will allow you to understand which events interest Italians, which values guide political life, and finally, which things determine the choices of our country.





## Life in Italy

We have all assumed certain standards, expectations, and ways of thinking and of doing things. It is important to understand that what is socially acceptable in one society may or may not be so in another. It is also very important to hold back with quick and superficial judgments and opinions that later on will often appear to be wrong (but by then it may already be too late!). So keep observing and if you do not understand, ask for explanations. An Italian proverb says: "Il mondo è bello perché è vario" "The world is beautiful because there is variety", things are different and not necessarily they are better in one part of the world or another. You need to be able to adopt other people's point of view in order to be able to interpret them.

### For example...



#### Stare insieme

Your social activities while you are in Italy will be numerous. You will spend time with your family, with friends, schoolmates, teachers, other INTERCULTURA

students in your area, INTERCULTURA volunteers, and many

other people who you will meet during your stay. At the beginning, your arrival will arise a lot of curiosity and with it, lot of questions about both you and your country—some of them could be rhetorical or seem like stupid questions. In other moments, confusion and linguistic difficulties will gain the upper hand.

You will meet groups of friends that have been together for a long time: not all of them (perhaps none) will know your language and they will have shared the same experiences, the same friends, the same rhythms and habits which are completely new to you.

To become part of a group, other than talking about yourself, you need to try to understand what the others are expressing both verbally and non-verbally. Therefore, it is important to observe what they are doing. Young people usually get together at the house of a friend, or in places where one can play sports or do other activities. Foreign students who have been on the program have noticed that young Italians talk a lot in the afternoon about what they are going to do at night, but rarely ever do what they had planned earlier. In fact, they usually prefer to stare insieme, just to stay together. They tend to go to a bar (Italian bars are completely different from American bars, they are more like snack bars), a pizzeria, or a birreria, a discoteca, a festa. In small towns and cities, both young people and adults traditionally go to the main piazza, park, or street in the afternoon or on Sunday morning, and walk and meet their friends.

#### La moda

Italian fashion is famous around the world, though it is not just a question of styles. Italian fashion has become so conventional and so wide known that some foreigners exaggerate to have that "Italian look", thinking that it will fit them too. Many of you will arrive in Italy with a personal dress code that may be very different from the standard Italian "look."



Don't worry. Try to observe closely how people dress for school, for parties, for formal occasions, for going to church, to work, or to a disco. If you are not sure about what may or may not be correct for a particular occasion, ask your family or your friends.

We do not suggest that you change your style or way of doing things so as to "fit in." Don't think you will lose your identity by following the habits of our country. You will be enriching your experience if you try to understand these habits and what they produce instead of just following them.

#### Bella figura

It is not very easy to translate "bella figura" into another language.

However, it is a concept and a way of life that pervades Italian society, and by understanding it or knowing something about it, you may find answers to some of your most puzzling observations.

In a general sense bella figura could mean "making a good impression": looking nice, saying the right thing at the right time, giving somebody the right gift, hosting a sumptuous dinner, and so on. In contrast, there is also the opposite concept of brutta figura, or "making a bad impression."



Here are some examples of brutta figura:

- being poorly or unsuitably dressed for social functions (weddings, dinners, parties,)
- getting drunk
- being socially "cold" (not greeting people, not shaking hands with people you have already met)

In Italy, there is no age limit to purchase or drink alcoholic beverages of any kind. A glass of wine is generally taken at lunch and dinner. Young people are taught to know their limits, and getting drunk is not only brutta figura, but is also considered immature by people of all ages. Remember that a glass of wine is not a glass of coke, so don't fill your glass as if you were pouring a soft drink. Remember also that if you get drunk once, you will probably be forgiven by your friends as you are a foreigner, but if you get drunk a second time, you may lose all your acquaintances and get completely isolated.



### Smoking

Although the number of female smokers and young smokers is one of the highest in Europe, the general attitude about smoking is becoming more rigid. Smoking is not

allowed in most public places nor at school; however, the rights of non-smokers are not taken into consideration very often. Do not

expect an Italian smoker to ask permission before lighting up, even at a dinner table while the others are still eating.

### Greeting people

Depending on the time of day, you say buon giorno or buona sera for both "hello" and "goodbye." Ciao is used only if you are addressing a contemporary, a younger person, for a person you are very well acquainted with; it is rude if used otherwise.

When first meeting somebody, it is always normal to shake hands, with no difference between sexes. Women very often kiss even at the farewell of the first encounter, although the kiss is more like touching each other's cheeks.

On subsequent meetings, they will usually continue to greet one another with a kiss on both cheeks.

In Central and Southern Italy, more so than in Northern Italy, it is normal for men to greet a woman as well as a man with a handshake or even a kiss. Sometimes this is a display of genuine affection; often it is more ritual and less spontaneous.

Attention girls! You should be aware of young males who will be gambling on your initial uncertainty with regard to this Italian ritual. If you observe your friends, you should be able to understand the "limits!"

## Feste in Italia (holidays)

|             |                       |                                     |
|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 January   | New Year              | Capodanno                           |
| 6 January   | Epiphany              | La Befana                           |
|             | Easter Monday         | Pasquetta or<br>Lunedì dell'Angelo  |
| 25 April    | Liberation Day        | Anniversario<br>della Liberazione   |
| 1 May       | May Day               | Primo Maggio or<br>Festa del Lavoro |
| 15 August   | Assumption            | Festa dell'Assunzione<br>Ferragosto |
| 1 November  | All Saints'           | Festa di Ognisanti                  |
| 8 December  | Immaculate Conception | L'Immacolata Concezione             |
| 25 December | Christmas Day         | Natale                              |
| 26 December | Boxing Day            | Santo Stefano                       |
| 31 December | New Year's Eve        | San Silvestro                       |

### Key words...

Osservare/To observe  
 Stare insieme/Spend time together  
 Bere/Drinking,  
 Fumare/ Smoking.  
 Buon Giorno Hello-Good Morning:  
 The usual day time greeting.  
 Buona Notte/Good Night: The  
 usual greeting within the family  
 used before going to bed. The nor-  
 mal night time farewell.  
 Buona sera/Good evening: Evening  
 time farewell.  
 Ciao/Hi-Bye: Usual greeting bet-  
 ween young people and members  
 of a family. It could be rude to say  
 ciao to an adult with whom you  
 are not very well acquainted.

Every city has its own Santo patrono (patron Saint) whose holiday usually involves some kind of interesting events and celebrations and the closing of schools, offices, and businesses.



## YOUR ITALIAN FAMILY

Why does a family host a foreign student?

To learn about another country, to acquaint one's children with his/her contemporaries, to have a child (in cases where parents do not have their own), to "experiment" with the program with which one's own children may have participated in, or to take advantage of the host student's language capacities,...

INTERCULTURA's volunteers explain the aims of the program and verify and the family's openness and willingness to host. Your family is not paid to host you. They have agreed to take you into their homes as one of their own children.

### **Keep in mind...**

It's very important to show your appreciation often and in the simplest way; by saying grazie (thank you) and by showing sincere interest in their daily life.

Having applied to have a foreign student does not mean that your host family is completely aware of what it means: they do not know until they try. It is a new experience for them too, so remember not to consider things "expected".

You are coming to Italy not as an ospite (guest) but as a new member of your Italian family and therefore, you will be sharing the work and responsibilities of the house as well as the happy moments shared by the members of your family.

To establish a good relationship based on reciprocal trust with your family we suggest to: communicate openly, talk as much as possible about your doubts, your ideas, and your plans, make them aware of your feelings, tell them about your moments of joy as well as discomfort.

Remember that your host family can help you to "fit in" more than anybody else. Your Italian parents and siblings know the habits and way of life in the community and the school; they can explain to you what is considered "correct" in every different context you happen to face. Give them the possibility to help you in understanding what may seem incomprehensible or wrong to you.

Some families might ask you to speak your native language with them or their children; however, you must learn Italian as quickly as possible in order to get along in our society better and faster and to have a richer experience. In such a situation, you might propose a knowledge exchange: each person will help the other in a subject in which they are particularly familiar. This could be as useful for you as it is for them.

### Your Italian family

When people think of the typical Italian family, most likely they imagine a large family: papà, mamma, many figli, zii, zie, nonni, and cugini (dad, mom, children, uncles, aunts, grandparents and cousins). Perhaps this was true some time ago, but things are different nowadays. The average family generally consists of the genitori and one figlio or two. There is also an increasing number of one-parent families. Italian family still remains one of the cornerstones of the society. Family members tend to depend on one another quite a bit for both material and moral support in every day life. Even after marriage, the ties between children and parents and other relatives remain close. On the week-ends, at Christmas and Easter families often get together with their relatives.

### **Keep in mind...**

The Italian mamma remains the central figure in the family and in the house.

The father has a great influence on the management of family life.

### Houses

Houses in Italy vary quite a bit. Generally there are three types: apartment or condominium, a big country house surrounded by land, or a townhouse with a small garden (yard).

However Italian families, especially in the cities, live in apartments. Young people tend to continue to live at home for a long time and they often leave their families only when they get married. This is also due to the fact that apartments are expensive and very difficult to find.



## The members of the family

The Italian padre (father), especially among young couples, does participate in the raising of the children and spends most of his free time with his family;

Nowadays, the Italian madre (mother) also has a job outside the house, and in this case the domestic chores are divided among the members of the family. However there are still, many Italian housewives who spend most of their time at home.

If there is a fratello (brother) or a sorella (sister) of your age in your Italian family, he or she will be an important reference point for you during your stay.

By observing your brother's or sister's behavior in the family, or with friends at school, you can learn about social codes in our country.

Remember that your Italian brother or sister - like you - will need to get used to you and to the new family life with another person being part of it, and will, therefore, need time to get to know you and appreciate you.

Since, it is likely that you will be spending most of your time with him/her, both of you may need your moments of privacy and you should not become annoyed if he/she is not always available to help or to listen to you. However, you should be sensitive, when looking for your own privacy or moments of solitude. Explain to your Italian family that it is because of your needs and not because you feel uncomfortable to be around them. Many students find that their host brothers and sisters are always studying and have no time to spend with them. They spend a good deal of time with lo studio (studying), and some sport activities, but do not go out very often in the evening. You should learn how to spend some time with your host brothers and sisters but don't rely on them for all your entertainment. Try to make friends at school. Special activities and going out are generally reserved for sabato and domenica (Saturday and Sunday) as Italian ragazzi (children/young people) mostly follow the family life during the week.

It is quite common for Italian children to exchange and use one another's belongings (clothing, books, jewelry, music, and so on). Observe whether this is the case with your Italian family or not, but also pay attention to the values given to things possessed by your Italian siblings, and wait until your relationship is solid before "joining in."

You might be placed in a family with small children, in which case you would be especially fortunate. Since children have a much more elementary knowledge of their native language, they can often teach you Italian rather quickly. Italian children are generally quite sociable and affectionate and for them helping you to learn can be a lot of fun. Remember to spend a little bit of time with them because they have great expectations about your arrival and will be very disappointed if you ignore them.

During your stay, you will notice the typical Italian respect for elderly persons. It is becoming more rare for grandparents to live in the same house with the rest of the family, but their opinions and advises are still highly considered. Even if it may seem difficult to establish a relationship with them, you may find it worthwhile trying to get to know them.

### *Keep in mind...*

Respect the rules of your family and remember that these rules pertain to you just as they do to the other children in the house

When you are invited somewhere always ask your family's permission before accepting.

Your school work is considered very important; therefore, you have to study well and do your homework, even if at the beginning it will be difficult.

Your Italian parents will always want to know where you are, who you are going out with, and at what time you are going to return home. You should always inform them and let them know if you have changed your plans or if you are going to be late.

This is nothing more and nothing less than what they want to know from their natural children.



## Scolding means caring

In Italy, you will probably find that both at home and at school it is more likely that you will be criticized rather than praised. Parents seem to always emphasize what their children do not do or what they do poorly. It is important that you realize that it may be somewhat normal for your Italian siblings to be lectured or scolded, and therefore, perhaps it might become normal also for you. The same can be said about advice and recommendations: Italian parents always repeat what you should do or what you should have done. Note that this is not a lack of trust or respect, as it may appear to a foreigner; it is often a sign of attention, affection, and care.



## The rules of your Italian family

Of course your Italian family follows different rules than those of your family at home. From the very beginning, ask to be given small household responsibilities; *apparecchiare* (to set the table), *sparecchiare* (to clean off the table), *lavare e asciugare i piatti* (to wash and dry the dishes), *mettere in ordine la tua stanza* (to keep your room in order), *innaffiare le piante* (to water the plants), *portare fuori le immondizie* (to take out the trash), *lavare la tua biancheria* (to wash your laundry) and so on.

Most likely, your family will tell you *non ti preoccupare* (don't worry about it). This will be OK only for the first couple of days, but then you should be sensitive enough to understand that they actually expect or would appreciate your help without having to ask for it. And be certain to ask if there are particular house rules (meal times, curfews, and so on) that you should follow.

Ask for clarifications when you are not sure of what has been said to you and don't be afraid to ask especially if you felt that you may have done something wrong. It is possible that at the beginning, your family will not tell you what you should or should not do, in fear of hurting your feelings.

Instead, when you need to make some decision remember to take into consideration the reactions and feelings of your family.

## E' buona educazione (Good manners)

Let us start with some examples of strange or different things about the Italians that have been said by many other former exchange students:

·You should not walk around in bare feet either in the house or outside. Outside the house, the only time you would see Italians walking barefooted would be just on the beach right before swimming.

### Keep in mind...

What are the similarities and differences with your natural family? Remember that there will be problems, misunderstandings and disagreements - aren't there in your family too

·Do not put your feet on chairs, couches, or tables. Even if you see others doing it, it is considered an extremely bad habit.

·Do not go outside with wet hair. This actually is not only a question of good manners, but it is connected to the Italians' perceptions about what is healthy and what is not.

·Do not close yourself in your room unless it is to sleep or to study. Italian families spend a lot of time together reading, talking, or watching the television. It is considered particularly rude to close oneself in the bedroom with a friend of the opposite sex, it is simply "off limits" in Italy. Even with a friend of the same sex, the door is left open so that no one feels "excluded."



Remember to exchange greetings with your family in the morning (Ciao), before leaving the house (Ciao) and before going to bed (Buona notte).

·Do not take food from the refrigerator without asking first, especially at the beginning of your stay when you are still trying to understand the family rules. Eating together is an important part of the Italian social life.

·Do not bring home friends without asking permission first, just a telephone call would be fine.

·If you note differences between your culture and the Italian culture, try to talk about it and understand the differences without immediately deciding which is “better”. Some things are simply different because of different social or cultural values which you might not have taken into consideration beforehand. You should always feel free to contact your local INTERCULTURA counselor if you need advice, clarifications or just a shoulder to cry onto.

## Useful Information

### Electricity

Italian voltage is 220 volts. If in your country, the voltage is different, you should avoid bringing powerful electrical appliances, such as a hair dryer because you’d need a powerful transformer that is bulky and heavy. The family hair dryers are just as good as yours. There are some small gadgets called “transformers” that actually are just electronic adapters, but they waste power and produce a lot of electrical “pollution.” In Italy, electrical power is very expensive and you should always pay attention to turn off lights and appliances when they are not needed anymore.

### The bathroom

Most Italian homes have one or two bathrooms complete with a shower or a bathtub or both. Often the hot water heater will be regulated by a timer or turned on only for the time it is needed. Therefore, you should ask your family when is the best time to take a shower or bath and how the heater works; gas heaters that produce hot water on demand may perform poorly if you turn the hot water knob on and off.

Remember to clean the tub or the shower basin after you have finished and to dry the floor, if you have gotten it wet. In fact, one of the biggest complaints that we receive from the families concerns the sloppiness in the use of the bathroom.

Many families, especially large ones, have turns for using the bathroom: try to respect your turn and not to spend too much time in the bathroom during those “rush hours.” You might have to share the bathroom with someone else and sometimes at the same time.

### The bidè

In almost every Italian bathroom, close to the toilet, there is another sanitary appliance known as the bidè; this appliance is completely unknown in many countries. There have often been many problems of drought throughout the Mediterranean area, which made it nearly impossible to take a shower or a bath. The introduction of the bidè was a clever idea which permitted people to wash certain parts of the body more often without wasting too much water. It continues to remain useful today.





## Laundry

Ask your family about laundry habits (il bucato). In most cases, your Italian family will wash your belongings with those of the other members of the family.

In other cases, you may be expected to do some of your own laundry. You should demonstrate your willingness to follow the habits of the other members of the family.

The most important thing is not to leave your dirty clothes around, spread all over the place.

## Your room

In Italian families any room is part of the house just like any other, and everybody can therefore, enter without knocking or asking your permission. Usually doors are left open and one doesn't close him/herself in his/her room unless it is to sleep or to study. It will be your duty to keep it clean and in order.



## Curfew

Host families are usually quite strict regarding time schedules. Ask for information about these times as soon as you arrive and then respect them. Always remember to inform your parents about where you are going, and if you will be arriving home late.

Be responsible and leave a message if you are going out and nobody else is at home at that time.

### Key words...

Stanco-a / Tired

Io ho sonno / I am sleepy

Io ho fame / I'm hungry

Io sono sazio-a / I am full.

## Free time

Especially during your first few weeks you will experience a lot of free time. Former exchange students have complained that they expected their Italian families to organize activities for them and were disappointed to discover that family members had their own work/study programs to keep up with. Ask your family and your INTERCULTURA counselor for suggestions, but use your **own initiative** to discover

the area where you are living and to become involved in the local cultural and sport activities available to you.

## Meals

Meals are important moments of the day. While eating, the family members spend time talking about what has been going on at school, at work, with friends and so on. Meal times vary from family to family, but generally the meals are eaten at the following times:

colazione (breakfast)

between 7:00 and 8:00am

pranzo (lunch)

between 1:00 and 2:00pm

cena (dinner)

between 7:30 and 9:00pm

Especially at noon it may happen that some members of the family do not come home for lunch; in any case, the family members that are at home do have their lunch together.





## What is eaten?

The Italians generally have a light breakfast of *caffelatte* (coffee and milk) or *tè* (tea) along with *biscotti* (cookies), crackers, *pane e marmellata* (bread with jam), or *pane e miele* (bread with honey). Although Italians are somewhat changing their eating habits for lunch and dinner, these meals usually consist of a *primo piatto* (first entrée) which is *pasta asciutta* (pasta) or *minestra* (soup), and a *secondo piatto* (second entrée) which consists of a main dish (either meat, fish, cold meats, eggs, or cheeses) with a *contorno* (cooked vegetables) or *insalata* (salad, fresh vegetables).



*Frutta* (fruit) is eaten after the meal, sometimes preceded by *formaggio* (cheese) or *dolce* (dessert). After lunch, less frequently after dinner, there might be *il caffè* (coffee), the Italian kind that foreigners get to appreciate after some time. Beverages consist of *acqua* (water), often mineral water, plain or carbonated, seldom soft drinks, and *vino* (wine) for the grown-ups. *Birra* (beer) is not a common household beverage, but is very common outside the house, especially at a *pizzeria* (pizza place).

Taste every food before deciding whether or not you like it, even if it looks strange or if you haven't heard of it before. Try not to ask your family for special foods, unless you have a medical prescription.



Special diets connected to religious or philosophical principles may be a heavy burden on your family, unless they share the same principles; therefore avoid being rigid in your position and be grateful when your family partially changes their habits in order to meet your needs half way. Some vegetables that make up a vegetarian's diet may be hard to find as specialized shops are rare (and expensive).

You might gain weight during your experience: gaining weight is normal when going abroad for a year, with all the changes it causes in terms of diet, times of meals...etc. Don't worry!



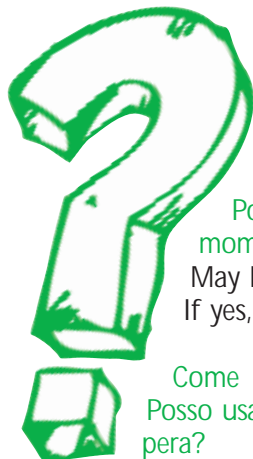
## DOMANDE PER I PRIMI GIORNI CON LA TUA FAMIGLIA OSPITANTE QUESTIONS FOR THE FIRST DAYS WITH THE HOST FAMILY

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Come vi devo chiamare: mamma, papà, con i vostri nomi?  
How should I call you: mom, dad or first names?

Cosa devo fare quotidianamente in casa oltre a farmi il letto, tenere la mia camera in ordine, pulire il bagno dopo averlo usato, ...?  
What else am I expected to do daily other than making my bed, keeping my room tidy, cleaning the bathroom every time I use it, ...?

Dove devo mettere la mia roba sporca aspettando che venga lavata?  
Where should I keep my dirty clothes until wash day?



Devo lavare personalmente la mia biancheria intima?  
Should I wash my own underclothes?

Posso servirmi della lavatrice in qualsiasi momento? Se sì, come funziona?  
May I use the washing machine at any time? If yes, how does it work?

Come siete organizzati in casa per stirare? Posso usare il ferro da stiro? Se sì, come si adopera?  
May I use the iron and what is the procedure for ironing?

Dove posso mettere le mie cose da bagno? Posso usare il vostro dentifricio, sapone, sciacquo, etc?  
Where can I keep my bathroom accessories? May I use your tooth-paste, soap, shampoo, etc?

Come siete abituati ad usare il bagno? Posso farmi la doccia tutti giorni? A che ora?  
What is the procedure about using the bathroom? May I take a shower every day and at what time?

A che ora si fa la colazione, pranzo e cena?  
What time do you usually have meals?

Avrò dei compiti precisi all'ora dei pasti (apparecchiare, sparecchiare, lavare i piatti...)?  
Do I have permanent chores at meal times (set the table, clean up, do the dishes, ...)?

In casa posso sempre prendermi da mangiare e da bere fuori pasto o devo chiedere prima il permesso?  
May I help myself for food and drinks between meals or must I ask first?

Ci sono delle zone in casa dove non posso andare?  
Are there strictly private areas at home?

Dove posso mettere i miei vestiti? Posso avere degli attaccapanni?  
Where can I put my clothes? May I have a coat hanger?

Posso usare: la macchina da cucire, la macchina da scrivere, il computer, il pianoforte, la bicicletta, etc...?  
May I use: the sewing-machine, the typewriter, the computer, the piano, the bicycle, etc.?

Dove devo mettere le mie valigie?  
Where should I store my suitcase?

A che ora mi devo alzare in settimana e a che ora la domenica?  
What time must I get up on week days and what time on Sundays?

Entro che ora dovrei andare a letto normalmente?  
What time should I usually go to bed on week days?

Quali sono le regole riguardanti le uscite serali?  
What are your rules about going out at night?

Devo telefonare se sono in ritardo o se perdo il treno o l'autobus?  
Do you expect me to phone if I'm going to be late or if I miss the train or bus?

Ogni tanto posso invitare degli amici a mangiare o a dormire a casa? Se sì, con quanto anticipo devo avvisare?  
May I invite my friends to the house to eat or to sleep over? In this case, how much in advance should I tell you?

Posso personalizzare la mia camera cambiando la disposizione dei mobili o attaccando foto o posters?  
May I personalize my room moving the furniture or hanging up pictures and posters?

Quali sono le regole per l'uso del telefono, per le chiamate urbane ed interurbani e per l'e-mail?  
What are the rules about using the phone, making local and long distance phone calls and the e-mail?

Dove e quando posso andare in chiesa/sinagoga/moschea?  
Where and when may I go to church/synagogue/mosque?

Posso guardare la televisione, ascoltare la radio o lo stereo quando ne ho voglia?  
May I watch TV, listen to the radio or stereo if I want to?

Cosa devo fare per spedire delle lettere?  
What is the procedure for mailing letters?



## Your Italian High School (Scuola media superiore)

School plays an important role in your experience in Italy. Most exchange students begin to have positive results in school after only a couple of months.

Once you become a regular student, just like your Italian compagni (schoolmates), you have the same rights and the same responsibilities. Since school occupies such a large amount of time, it is important for you to consider it not only as a place to study, but also as a meeting place to make friends.



### Facts and situations about Italian Schools

- The scuola media superiore (high school) in Italy lasts for five years.
- The school year starts in mid-September and ends in June. Some one day civil holidays are spread over the school year and in some regions, the School Authority may authorize a few other days of vacation.
- School days are Monday–Saturday. (Some schools may have a “short week” – Monday to Friday).
- The day usually starts about 8.00 and finishes about 1.30.
- There are normally 5 - 6 periods a day - each about 50 minutes long.
- A typical class has 20 - 25 students.
- Students are of the ages 14-19.
- Lunch is not served in the Italian schools.
- Almost all INTERCULTURA /AFS students are placed in state schools. There are however many private schools and their host brothers/sisters may attend them.
- There is a 10-15 minute break (intervallo), when the campanella (school bell) rings, students leave their classes and meet each other in the school hallways, or they use this break to have a snack.
- La valutazione (evaluation): Oral and written tests are given for all subjects. The grading system is based on the scale of 0-10, but the extreme values are never used (3/4=very poor, 5=insufficient, 6=sufficient, 7=good, 8/9=excellent).

For example when you finally receive your pagella (mid term report) with your voti (grades) and you have received one or more scores of 4 or 5, you should decide to work harder.



### Principals and Teachers

The preside (principal) - Has chief responsibility for running the high school along with a board made up of teachers, students, parents, and others.

The insegnanti (teachers) – Students have their lessons in the same classe (classroom), while the insegnanti alternate classrooms. The relationships between students and teachers are somewhat formal. Your open and warm behavior should help your relationships with your teachers and Principal as well, but keep in mind that respect of authority is still highly appreciated in Italy.



### Homework and tests

Students are regularly given compiti a casa (homework). You should try, even asking your family and your compagni for help, to complete all of your homework in the best way you can from the very beginning in order to get used to it, to participate more actively in the school life and to be prepared for the interrogazioni (oral tests) and compiti in classe (written tests), just as your classmates and siblings do. If you don't plan to study at least for a while every afternoon,

you'll find yourself bored and isolated because you'll not find any friend free to spend time with you.

If you have a particularly difficult time with certain materie (subjects) you should discuss the matter with your INTERCULTURA counselor or your tutor at school and ask for his/her intervention and advice.

#### **Keep in mind...**

A teacher has always something to give you. You have to get a good relationship with the teachers from the start, show the teachers that you are willing to learn.

If for any reason neither your Italian family nor INTERCULTURA introduce you to the Preside you should ask one of your teachers to do it for you.

### School Attendance

School attendance is compulsory, even if you might find it difficult. AFS students have been removed from their host schools and sent home for not attending classes on a regular basis. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to ask the teacher about any assignments or tests missed. As an exchange student, you are here on a student visa and are expected to attend school regularly.

If a student misses one or more days of school, he/she must have a written giustificazione by the family. Students are not allowed to enter late or leave early without written permission from the family, or, in case of some sudden illness, without the intervention of some teacher or the Preside himself.

#### **Keep in mind...**

Your professore di matematica (math teacher) asks you to do a compito in classe just like the rest of the class.

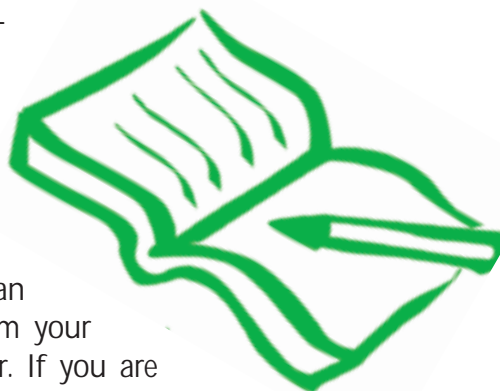
\*\*\*You should try to do it.

When the moment of the interrogazione arrives. The teacher asks you to talk in Italian about one or more topics which you should have studied.

\*\*\*You should try your best in giving your answers, even if you are afraid that your compagni will laugh at you.

### Textbooks

Italian schools require students to buy their own textbooks, which can be rather expensive; for this reason, students tend to buy second hand books. It is important for you to understand which books you need at the beginning because you will most likely not need all of your books immediately. You should be able to borrow some of the books from your Italian siblings, while others may be available from your school or the local INTERCULTURA chapter. If you are unable to find books in this way, INTERCULTURA will refund you for any textbooks you have to buy.



### The High School System in Italy

After five years of elementary school and three years of middle school (scuola media) an Italian student may choose among a variety of secondary schools. The chart below shows the different types of schools which you may be enrolled in and the types of subjects that are studied. Most of the schools are academic, but vocational schools are available. In most schools the subjects are the same and are compulsory, with the only exception of Religion which the students have the option of not attending.



**LICEO CLASSICO:** stresses humanities (Latin and ancient Greek are compulsory subjects) although scientific subjects are also taught, leading to a diploma that allows students to gain access to all university courses. It is a five year course. The Liceo classico is a very demanding school.

Subjects: Italian Literature, Latin, Greek, History, Geography, Biology, Math, Physics, Religion, History of Art, Philosophy.

**LICEO SCIENTIFICO:** stresses scientific subjects although providing a general education in humanities and languages. The diploma allows students to gain access to all university courses. It is a five year course.

Subjects: Sciences, Math, Chemistry, Biology, Astronomy, Physics, Italian literature, one Foreign Language, Art, History of Art, Philosophy, Latin.

**LICEO LINGUISTICO:** puts an emphasis on the studying of foreign languages but scientific and classical subjects are also available.

Subjects: Italian Literature, Latin, Art History, English, French, German or Spanish, Math, Biology, Chemistry, Physics.

**LICEO ARTISTICO:** a four year course where art is taught. It gives admission to the school of architecture and to the various academies of fine arts.

Subjects: Decorative Drawing, Still Life Drawing, Use of different perspective Drawing, Math, Sciences.

**ISTITUTO MAGISTRALE:** a four to five year course, preparing elementary school teachers. It gives access to some university courses such as psychology, child psychology, foreign languages, Italian literature.

Subjects: Italian Literature, Latin, History of Art, Italian Literature, Geometric Design, History, Geography, Sciences, Math, one Foreign Language, Philosophy, Psychology.

**ISTITUTO TECNICO PER GEOMETRI:** a professional school of five years duration, preparing students for a career as land surveyors or as specialists at intermediate levels in the construction business.

**ISTITUTO TECNICO COMMERCIALE:** a professional school of five years duration, preparing students for a career in accountancy, banking, etc.

**OTHER TYPES OF ISTITUTO TECNICO:** all of five years duration, preparing students in different technical fields (agriculture, tourism, chemical industry, etc.).

Although Italian schools usually do not organize any extra-curricular activities (sports, theatre, etc.) after school hours, things are changing because of the reform first introduced in 1998 which gives schools more autonomy; therefore, more and more activities are offered by each school. A chance to have a very nice experience is given by the annual school trip during which the class, accompanied by some of their teachers, visits places of historic, artistic, or natural relevance.



## Situations and suggestions

### Your first days of school

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You enter into the classe (classroom) and your compagni (classmates) have never seen you. They don't know where you come from, why you are in their class, or they might not know anything about INTERCULTURA.

\*\*\*You should try to introduce yourself saying your first and last name clearly enough and with friendly attitude.

Your compagni, out of curiosity, ask you all kinds of questions, which might even appear intrusive to you.

\*\*\*You should try to satisfy their curiosity in the best way you can.

The first day of school the professore (teacher) enters into the classe.

\*\*\*You should go to introduce yourself.

Some professori and even some compagni may not know any language in which they can communicate with you, at least at the beginning of your experience.

\*\*\*You should try everything, even gestures and signs, in order to communicate.

The professore begins a lezione (lesson) and even with all of your willingness, you can barely understand anything he/she is saying.

\*\*\*You should make a strong effort to understand and at the end of the lezione you should try to verify what you have understood with your professore or with a compagno.

Your compagni exchange jokes among themselves and you don't understand them.

\*\*\*You should try to ask one of them to explain the jokes to you. You should realize that there is no reason to be offended at jokes you may not understand, your Italian classmates love to make fun of each other, none of them will be surprised if you ask them for an explanation.

The campanella rings at the end of a lezione. Everybody leaves scuola together.

\*\*\*You should try to join one of the small groups as they are leaving.

You return home and your family is anxious to know all about how your day at scuola was and they ask you many questions.

\*\*\*You should try to tell them as much as possible about how things went and you comment about your first impressions, but maintain control on quick judgements.

Some of your professori or compagni feel that since the subjects taught in the Italian school system are more difficult, education in Italy is superior to the school system in your country.

\*\*\*You should not feel offended, each system has its values.

Don't close yourself off to others and put distance between you and the people around you out of fear of being laughed at (which happens to everybody, right?) or of failures at school (ask your classmates for help in this area). If you are having problems in school which you are unable to solve with the help of your teachers or schoolmates, you should turn to your INTERCULTURA counselor.

If you have school problems, just take a look at your Italian classmates: they often encounter difficulties as well. If you have difficulties in understanding things no matter how hard you try, discuss your problems with those people who can help you. Don't give up!



# COMMUNICATION

Try to learn Italian from the very moment you receive this booklet.

## WHY?

Because even a minimal knowledge of the language will facilitate your first contacts with your Italian family, with the school and with your friends.

It will show them your interest and motivation to understand our life and culture.

It will encourage them to help you in those moments when you are already overwhelmed by all the other things you have encountered.

It is obvious that at the beginning, and probably for several weeks, you will not understand a large part of what is being said to you or what those around you are talking about. Pay close attention to the way you speak and learn to speak slowly, pronouncing the ends of the words in a clear manner.

### **Keep in mind...**

You should always be ready to listen and to ask if you don't understand something.

Don't be discouraged because it's the only way to understand and learn.

### **Keep in mind that...**

Intercultura will organize Italian language courses to help you build on your linguistic knowledge.

You shouldn't be worried about making mistakes.

You should do everything you can to help yourself learn Italian!

### **Non-verbal communication**

Learning a language means much more than learning vocabulary and grammar. It is not enough to be "literate," you must also be "culturally literate," and this means learning to use all kinds of communication which make up part of a culture.

Only about 30 percent of what is communicated in a conversation between two persons, from the same culture speaking their native language, is verbal. Since so much intercultural communication takes place with at least one of the parties speaking a second language, it seems safe to assume that across cultures we may rely even more on nonverbal behavior. Add to this the point that most of us are totally unaware of what we are communicating by our "normal" behavior (and that a person from another culture is likely to be unusually conscious of that behavior, often without properly interpreting it), and the importance of the nonverbal dimension increases even further.

The distance between you and the person with whom you are speaking, the use of the hands while speaking, eye contact, and physical contact can all have different meanings in different cultures.

You will note for example that when Italians speak to one another, they generally stand much closer to each other than people from the northern European or east Asian cultures, but less close than people from Arab cultures.

### **Sociolinguistic aspects**

These include such things as sitting on the floor, touching your feet, eating loudly; these actions may be appropriate in some cultures while in Italy they are considered inappropriate.

In Italy, as everywhere, you will be talking with your eyes, with your smile, with your hands, with the way you walk, and with the way you dress.

### **Why is everybody screaming like that?**

You should know that Italian warmth and exuberance are often expressed by talking in tones which may appear very high to the new visitors that are in Italy for the first time. At the beginning of your stay, when you may not have completely mastered the language, you might think that the members of your Italian family keep arguing among themselves. Actually, the Italian way of discussing is very "lively" and spontaneous, and you will eventually be able to recognize that most of the discussions are an everyday routine task.

### **Physical contact...**

You should not be surprised by the amount of physical contact between people in Italy.

When they speak, the Italians tend to use hand gestures to the extent of touching the person they are speaking with. It is not unusual for friends of the same sex to walk arm and arm, or to touch one another on the hand, the arm, or the shoulder when they are talking.

In urban areas, it is not particularly unusual to see couples embracing or kissing in public.

**Good luck and have fun!**



## PERSONAL SAFETY<sup>1</sup>

Uncomfortable social situations can occur in any society. Such situations are most common among teenagers, an age group which is generally eager to try new and unknown experiences. It can be difficult to handle a new situation within your home society but, in a culture



that is new to you, such a situation can seem even more confusing. By presenting you with some legal and cultural rules in Italy, we hope to help you make informed decisions when confronted with sexual harassment, alcohol, and other drugs.

In any situation you may encounter during your stay in Italy, **it is important to keep in mind that you should not compromise your personal moral values or do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable while you are here on the AFS program.** While it is important for an exchange student to be open-minded, adventuresome, and accepting of the host culture, this does not mean you should ignore everything you have learned in your home culture. It is always a good idea to observe the behavior of those around you then follow what your inner voice tells you about what you have learned concerning what is right and what is wrong.

The best general advice AFS can recommend regarding issues of personal safety is as follows:

- Get to know the host culture through questions, dialogue and discussion with your host family, peers and the AFS local contacts.
- Take seriously any concerns expressed by your host family, school and AFS volunteers and follow their advice.
- As stated in the Participation Agreement document that you signed prior to leaving home, the national AFS office will make recommendations and give guidelines for physical welfare and security. Take this advice seriously and comply with these guidelines.
- Do not to ignore one's own instinct in any given situation or feel you have to compromise your own personal behavioral values and beliefs. These are valuable resources in making decisions about what to do.
- Read all of "Benvenuto in Italia" and take personal responsibility for making smart choices that will keep you safe and healthy.

<sup>1</sup> This section is primarily based on a documentary contribution from AFS USA.





## KNOW THE RULES TO KEEP YOURSELF SAFE

### Rule 1: Don't Go Out Alone.

THINK ABOUT IT before you go. Remember that if you can avoid situations that put you at risk in the first place, you're already one step ahead. There is safety in numbers and this rule is not just for little kids, it applies to everyone. We are always safer if we take a friend, host sister, or host brother.

### Rule 2: Always Tell an Adult Where You're Going

Again, THINK ABOUT IT. NEVER, EVER go somewhere with someone you don't know. This includes hitching rides. This includes baby-sitting for anyone without getting information about the family like where they live and even some reference about them FIRST. Leave a telephone number and an address with your family BEFORE you go. Letting someone know where you'll be at all times is smart. If you're ever faced with a risky situation or get into trouble, your host family and friends will know where to begin looking for you.

### Rule 3: It's Your Body

During your exchange year, you will face a lot of situations that put you in uncomfortable spots. You will constantly have to make decisions for yourself and will be faced with peer pressure about anything from who your friends are – male or female – to exposure to drugs and sex. One more time: THINK ABOUT IT. You have the right to reject unwanted and inappropriate attention such as teasing, touching, and bullying.

### Rule 4: Say NO if You Feel Threatened, and Tell a Trusted Adult

Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself. Listen to your intuition and follow your best judgment. If your friends are making bad decisions, you don't have to. Have the confidence to say NO if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable about anything. And remember, it's never too late for you to tell an adult if anything is bothering you. If someone – anyone – touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to say no. Whether it is peer pressure about sex, drugs, or doing something that you know is wrong, be strong and stand your ground. Don't be afraid to make your feelings known.

*Now you know the rules. You may have always known them, but now you can really get them. They're like bells that go off in your head when you're faced with a risky situation. They can't get you out of every tough spot, but they might keep you from getting into one.*

*We know that you're SMART and STRONG and ready to TAKE ON THE WORLD. Go do it, just use your head FIRST. Know the rules. From now on, these are your rules for life.*



## TEEN PREGNANCY

As so many of you have made clear, the teen years shouldn't be about pregnancy, parenting, midnight feedings, and diapers. We hope that you find these ideas useful – and perhaps see your own views and opinions reflected in them.

1. Thinking "it won't happen to me" is stupid; if you don't protect yourself, it probably will. Sex is serious.
2. Just because you think "everyone is doing it," doesn't mean they are. Some are, some aren't – and some are lying.
3. There are a lot of good reasons to say "no, not yet." Protecting your feelings is one of them.
4. You're in charge of your own life. Don't let anyone pressure you into having sex.
5. You can always say "no" – even if you've said, "yes" before.
6. Carrying a condom is just being smart – it doesn't mean you're pushy or easy.
7. If you think birth control "ruins the mood," consider what a pregnancy test will do to it.
8. If you're drunk or high, you can't make good decisions about sex. Don't do something you might not remember or might really regret.
9. Sex won't make him/her yours, and a baby won't make him/her stay.
10. Not ready to be someone's father? It's simple: Use protection every time or don't have sex

## INFORMATION ON SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)

Life Planning Education, Advocates for Youth, Washington DC

### Signs and Symptoms of STDs

Any of the following can indicate to a person who has had sexual intercourse that she or he may have an STD and should consult a doctor or clinic:

- Redness or soreness of the genitals
- Pain at urination; cloudy or strong-smelling urine
- Unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- A sore or blisters on or around the genitals, near the anus or inside the mouth
- Excessive itching or a rash
- Abdominal cramping
- A slight fever and an overall sick feeling
- A sexual partner with symptoms
- Weight loss, fatigue, night sweats, purple lesions on the skin, rare pneumonia and other diseases (AIDS symptoms)



### STD Prevention

The only completely effective preventive measure is to abstain from oral, anal and vaginal sexual intercourse. Contact with another person's body fluids can result in STD infection. There are several ways to reduce the risk of STD infection when having intercourse:

For the greatest protection: Use condoms and a spermicide such as nonoxynol-9 for every act of sexual intercourse. Use a moisture barrier, such as a dental dam, cut-open latex condom or plastic wrap, when having oral intercourse with a female partner.

For minimal protection: Inspect your partner's genitals; wash your genitals after sexual intercourse, urinate after sexual intercourse; use contraceptive foams, jellies, and creams that contain nonoxyno-9; limit your sexual partners to one person; avoid partners who have sex with other partners; talk to your partner about her/his sexual habits, drug use and health; get tested for sexually transmitted diseases with your partner.



### Appropriate Response to a STD

- See medical treatment immediately.
- Inform your sexual partner(s).
- Encourage partner(s) to get treatment.
- Abstain from sexual contact while infectious.

## HIV INFECTION AND AIDS INFORMATION



### Introduction

The topic of HIV infection and AIDS can seem overwhelming: it seems like every day the newspaper reports a new fact about the disease. Fortunately, although scientists and epidemiologists keep generating information that refines our understanding of the disease, the basic information about how the virus works and how infection can be prevented has remained the same for quite some time.

### When Are People with the Virus Infectious to Others?

People with HIV are infectious to others as soon as they are carrying the virus, even before antibodies are produced. People with HIV may not know they are infected and may look, act and feel healthy for a long time, possibly longer than 15 years. It is impossible to tell from looking whether or not a person is infected.

### How is HIV Transmitted?

HIV is transmitted from person to person through blood or membrane contact with blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk. Ways to get the virus include:

- Exchanging blood, semen or vaginal secretions during sex (vaginal, oral and anal) with someone who has HIV
- Sharing needles – which are used for injecting drugs (including steroids), tattooing or ear piercing – with someone who has HIV
- Being born to a mother who has the virus (HIV can be passed to a fetus through the umbilical cord while it is still inside the mother, through contact with vaginal fluids and blood during birth or through breast milk)

HIV cannot survive in air, water or on things people touch. You cannot get it from:

- Touching, talking to or sharing a home with a person who is HIV infected or has AIDS
- Sharing plates, glasses or towels used by someone with HIV infection or AIDS
- Using swimming pools, hot tubs, drinking fountains, toilet seats, doorknobs, gym equipment or telephones used by people with HIV infection or AIDS
- Have someone with HIV or AIDS spit, sweat or cry on you
- Being bitten by mosquitos
- Donating blood
- Being sneezed at or coughed on by a person with HIV infection or AIDS

### What is “Safer Sex?”

“Safer sex” describes a range of ways that sexually active people can protect themselves from infection with all sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection. Practicing safer sex also provides birth control protection.

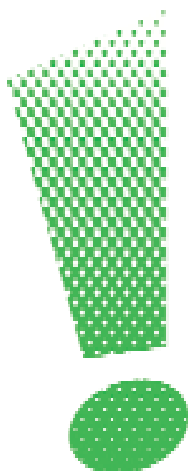


## How do I deal with peer pressure to become sexually active?

First, remember that almost everyone has to figure out how to deal with peer pressure. It doesn't happen by magic, but here are some tips for keeping the pressure off:

- Go out with a group of friends rather than only your date.
- Think of what you would say in advance in case someone tries to pressure you.
- Be ready to call your host mom, host dad or a friend to pick you up if you need to leave a date.
- Never feel obligated to "pay someone back" with sex in return for an expensive date or gift.
- Say "no" and mean "no" if that's how you feel.

For more information about HIV, STI and other issues, log on to <http://www.advocatesfor-youth.org/> or <http://www.iwannaknow.org> for answers to your questions about teen sexual health and sexually transmitted infection.



## IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU!

### *Protecting Yourself from Sexual Abuse*

#### What is sexual abuse?

During your AFS experience, you'll have many new and different experiences. Yet there are things that remain the same.

Your body is always yours.

You always have the right to say no.

If something doesn't feel right to you, it probably isn't.

If a friend gives you cause for concern, get involved.

This information is designed to help you learn more about sexual abuse, how to prevent it, and where to go for help.

#### True or False Quiz

Help protect yourself from potential sexual abuse. Circle True or False to each of these questions. Correct answers are on the next page

1. **True or False:** When abuse happens, it is never your fault.
2. **True or False:** An abuser may discourage you from communicating with your friends, family, and AFS Volunteers or ask that you not tell others about your relationship with him or her.
3. **True or False:** If someone, especially an adult, buys you an expensive gift and expects you to kiss him or her in return, you are obligated to do so.
4. **True or False:** Activities like being forced to look at pornographic books or film, or being photographed in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable is not sexual abuse. For sexual abuse to occur you must be physically touched.
5. **True or False:** If you are feeling uncomfortable because of physical attention you receive from someone, you should confront them and tell them to stop.



Regardless of where you travel on your exchange program or the customs of the country in which you're living, you can be sure of one thing—your body belongs to you. And, while it's rare that someone will attempt to abuse you, it's important for you to be alert, aware, and informed about sexual abuse prevention. Do not allow anyone to do anything to you that does not feel right to you—male or female—, young or old, regardless of who they are, what they do for a living, or your connection to them.

### Remember that it's always ok to say no.

If you feel threatened, tell an adult that you trust. This can be your natural parents, your host parents, an AFS Volunteer or Staff or any one else that you feel you can trust and rely upon. Never go out alone, especially to a place that is unfamiliar to you.

### Never go anywhere with a person you don't know.

When you do go out, always let an adult know where you are, and when your schedule or destination changes.

### Be a Friend to a Friend

If your friend tells you that they are being sexually abused, the first thing to do is listen. Be patient and respectful. Try not to judge or question behavior. Believe what your friend is telling you.

Go to an adult you trust for advice and help. Involve a parent, teacher, or another adult that you trust. You'll be helping to stop or prevent your friend from being abused.

Talk to your friend and try to get them to talk to an adult. Offer to go with him or her. Report the abuser to an adult whom you trust.

### Answers to the True and False Test

1. **True** - If you are sexually abused, it is never your fault. Always expect others to treat you with respect and dignity. You deserve an environment that is free of sexual abuse or the threat of sexual abuse.
2. **True** - One strategy of sexual abusers is to isolate you from your friends, family, and others. Without the support of others people feel lonely and often vulnerable. This allows abusers to get closer to their victims. Expect to have access to your friends and family.
3. **False** - Some sexual abusers try to make people feel uncomfortable by getting them to do things such as kissing as a way to show appreciation. If you feel pressure to do something you are not comfortable with, don't do it. By the way, if you don't feel comfortable accepting a gift, you can say no to that, too!
4. **False** - You don't have to be touched to be sexually abused. Being exposed to pornographic books or films is another way that an abuser will try to exploit you. Do not tolerate this. Report this to an adult that you trust.
5. **True** - Confront an adult you suspect of sexually abusing you and tell him or her to stop the abuse immediately. Always tell a trusted adult or AFS Volunteer or Staff about it as soon as possible.

## Getting Help

*Local AFS Volunteers and AFS Staff are available to help you in the event of sexual abuse that you or another has experienced. Contact your liaison immediately if you feel scared or concerned. You can find their contact information on your AFS ID card. You can also reach INTECULTURA Support Staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 0577 900001 or 348 5814200.*



# TELEPHONE, E-M@IL, LETTERS



In Italy, any phone call, both local and international, will be quite expensive. The cost depends on the length and the distance of the call. You should ask your family for advice both for your daily calls and for long distance ones so as to avoid embarrassing and unpleasant situations when the phone bill arrives! If you wish to call your natural family, you should call "collect" or use a phone card or a credit card.

In any case, we strongly discourage you from calling or writing e-mail home too often during your stay. By keeping in close telephone (mobiles included) or e-mail contact with friends and family at home, you might create a barrier between you and your Italian home and family. The emotional involvement of a phone call and the immediate response of an e-mail message could make both you and your natural family lose the right perspective towards daily life problems in an intercultural experience.

On the other hand, we strongly encourage you to write hand written letters during your stay. Writing letters can be a good exercise to think about and consider your experience in more depth. Many students also appreciate the fact that after they return home, there is a written account of their experience. Be careful, however, not to spend too much of your time writing since it may not seem social to your Italian family.

### Handy numbers:

To dial direct: your country code + area code + telephone number  
Collect & operator assistance: dial?

### Mail

The Italian postal service is generally reliable. Letters can take from one to several days for delivery within Italy, depending on the distance the letter needs to travel.



**Keep in mind...**  
Phone cards: are very popular, card phones are widespread throughout Italy. Mobile phones: are very popular but very expensive. If you are using your own mobile, it will get very expensive!

**Key words...**  
Comunicare/Communicate  
Parole/Words  
Telefono/Telephone  
Lettera/Letter  
Francobollo/Stamp  
Ufficio postale/Post Office  
Carta telefonica/Phone card  
Telefono cellulare/Mobile phone  
Parli italiano?/Do you speak Italian?  
Posso telefonare?/Can I make a phone call?



## READY TO START!

### FIRST THINGS FIRST:

#### Before departure

When you receive your host family papers write to your host family. The letter doesn't have to be long, they just want to hear from you. Your parents should also write to your host family. Don't worry about your host family not being able to read English, they will quickly find someone to translate it for them.

Remember the saying "É il pensiero che conta" , "it's the thought that counts".

#### First days in Italy

After the plane lands, you will collect your luggage, pass through customs, and be met by Intercultura staff and volunteers. When you've finished at the airport, the volunteers or staff will accompany you by bus to your arrival orientation, which usually lasts the rest of the day.

After you have spent so many long and tiring hours in the air, the orientation will give you a chance to relax, to meet other AFSers from around the world, and to learn about AFS in Italy and Italian culture. The orientation is run by volunteers. There is a welcoming ceremony organized for the students and the host families are invited to attend. After the orientation comes the long-awaited moment when you'll meet your host family. If you are placed in an area next to the orientation camp, your family will come to pick you up. If you are placed in another area, you will travel by train, most likely with other AFSers. Travel to Sardegna and Sicilia is by plane. There will be volunteers helping all the students to get to their trains, buses, or planes.



### WHAT TO BRING:

#### Gifts

You will need a gift for your host family, look at your host family papers and see who lives in the house, do they have grandma/grandpa/aunt? It is better to give something small to each member of the family than to give one large family gift. This makes each person feel special. Your gift should be something representative of your country.

Remember that it isn't the size of the gift that is important "É il pensiero che conta!". You should also bring a small gift for your host school. We suggest that a book about your country is ideal as it can be placed in the school library for all students to read.





### Souvenirs

Bring things that will help you tell about your home country and culture:

- Maps and photos of your country and of the area you live
- Photographs or slides of your family and friends
- Recipes of your favorite foods
- Some of your favorite music
- Folk music
- Characteristic games
- Handicrafts
- "Native" T-shirts, jewellery...
- Your national costume
- National flag
- Coins, notes and stamps

Add your own ideas...

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### Packing your suitcase

Apart from your everyday clothing, we advise you to bring :

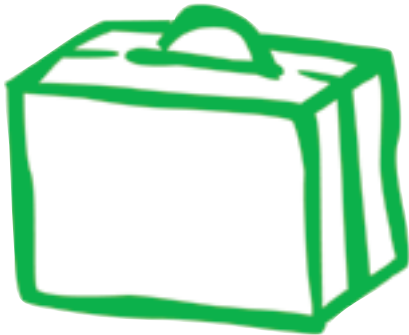
- casual clothes (T-shirts, jeans, trousers, skirts, shirts, sweaters)
- underwear
- socks
- a coat
- a heavy jacket
- a couple of "formal" outfits
- pajamas
- slippers
- a robe
- adequate shoes (formal, informal, winter)
- swimming suit
- raincoat (the kind that folds up into a little package)

(some of these suggestions may seem obvious to you, but every year we are amazed by what students "forget"!)





The temperature varies throughout Italy. During winter the temperature generally ranges from  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+5^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the North and in the mountains, while it remains from  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $8^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the Center and in the South. The summer temperatures generally range from  $25^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $35^{\circ}\text{C}$  in Northern, Central, and Southern Italy; in the North, summer temperatures are generally lower than in the rest of Italy, but the humidity level is much higher.



Many foreign students arrive in Italy with very light clothing, convinced that they are going to the Tropics. If you are coming for the winter or the year program, we strongly suggest that you remember to bring an overcoat or a heavy jacket that will keep you warm throughout the winter. If you need a new one, or if in your country they are not readily available, it makes sense to buy one after you arrive, just remember to bring along enough extra money so that your Italian family is not put in the embarrassing position of having to buy it for you.

Shorts are worn almost exclusively at the beach or when playing sports. In the cities, only tourists wear shorts. This applies to "short shorts," but even "bermudas" are out of style for girls and definitely not worn by boys. In general, young people dress informally but with care, wearing jeans and T-shirts during the warm season. \*Please remember to keep your luggage to a 20 kg (44lb) weight limit. This standard is recommended by AFS so that you will not encounter any problems with the airlines and buses used for AFS student travel. We strongly suggest you bring one large suitcase and one carry-one bag.

The carry-on is not included in the 20 kg (44lb) weight limit. AFS assumes no responsibility for charges on overweight luggage. Should you decide to exceed the recommendation and the airline demands payment when you check in, you will either have to pay the additional charges or leave your excess belongings behind. You are responsible for managing and carrying your own luggage. One way to find out if you've packed too much is to carry your luggage for five/ten minutes around your house. If you're tired, then you've packed too much.





## Money

Italian youngsters are not accustomed to have very much money and so you should pay attention to how they spend it (usually for social activities, pizzas, going to the caffè, cinema, and clothing). Students coming to Italy should be aware that Italian host siblings and parents might feel bad if they see that the student they host has a lot of money to spend which is not common at their age. Children do not normally have part-time jobs, therefore are dependent on their weekly/monthly allowance from their parents. Your Italian family is not expected to give you an allowance or pocket money. In some cases however, they do. Remember to show your appreciation.



### Examples of prices in Euro:

|            |                          |
|------------|--------------------------|
| Euro 1,30  | a can of Coca Cola       |
| Euro 0,80  | a cup of coffee          |
| Euro 6,75  | movie/cinema ticket      |
| Euro 5,00  | a roll of film           |
| Euro 50,00 | a pair of Levi's Jeans   |
| Euro 0,30  | per photo to develop     |
| Euro 11,00 | a night out to eat pizza |
| Euro 16,00 | an evening at a disco    |
| Euro 32,00 | a sweater                |

Other possible expenses that should be allotted for when budgeting money are organized school trips often abroad (in Europe) and the "exchange week" organized by the local chapters (generally for the Year Program students). These activities are not mandatory, however the majority of the students would like to take advantage of these extra opportunities when possible. Not all schools organize school trips. An average cost would be Euro 110,00 for an overnight excursion in Italy and Euro 220,00 for a school trip in Europe.

### First suggestion

Be sensitive to the family's economic level when considering spending a large amount of money.

### Second suggestion

The suggested amount of money for students coming on the Year Program is 1,000 Euro. Once in Italy, students can use cash or credit cards. They can open a bank account. All of them should however arrive in Italy with at least Euro 200,00 in cash. Students under the age of 18 cannot use travelers checks.



### Third suggestion

Save some money for the trip home when you will have to pay for food, drinks, phone calls, etc.

### What expenses does Intercultura cover?

Intercultura covers all academic expenses (relevant school books, travel to/from school). Intercultura does not pay for specific items (i.e. paper, colored pencils or watercolor etc, for art schools), school trips.

Apart from the above mentioned, Intercultura covers all medical expenses of students, except for those conditions existing before the students arrival in Italy. Intercultura organizes and covers the expenses of the post-arrival orientation and the final evaluation (and orientation camp for year and semester programs). Intercultura does not cover personal trips, personal expenses, neither does the host family unless they will insist to do so. Some local chapters cover and organize local activities.

